

LINDY LEBERT LOG

Summary: Lindbergh Lebert, pilot remembers how he started his career on the waterfront. He talks about “Texas Chicken”, and how it was a safe way for ships to meet, how he was on the committee responsible for widening of the ship channel, and how local knowledge is extremely important for a pilot.

01:25

Born 1929 in Lafayette, Louisiana. Came to Houston in 1946. Lindy short for Lindbergh. Family of farmers. During depression family did share cropping. In 41-42 started building raw material for WW II. Grew cotton, cane, large garden for family crops. Had 5 sisters. Money was scarce. Had animals on farm, grew vegetables. Went to store for borrowing not buying. Had homemade clothes. Made by Mom. Sewed, cooked, planted, helped father for harvesting. Did not know what money was. Spoke French in school. We're trying to get all French speakers to speak English. Spoke French at home. Father had good education. Could speak and write English and French. Only skilled labor was railroad. Did not get through high school. Dropped out after 9th grade. Worked in Lafayette from 2 pm- 10pm. Enjoyed childhood and growing up. No electricity. Hunted and fished. Mardi Gras was non-existent. Could not afford to go to town to watch. Started noticing Mardi Gras when older. Did not go to New Orleans till 20.

10:40

Friend's dad lived in Houston. Was tug captain for Pan American oil company. Invited to go with to Houston. Lived with friend's father and family for week. Started working at 17. Needed minor's release. Learnt work from others. That was the rest of my education. Got 500 ton pilot license. Worked for Bay Houston for 17 years. Then worked for electrical power company. Had 20,000 ton barge and moved coal from New Orleans to Tampa and brought back phosphate. _Raised license tonnage wise._ Have to take test to get license. Became a pilot at 38 years.

17:00

Met a lot of pilots and became friends. Got opportunities to work as pilot when there was a requirement. Started work in 1967 and left in 97. Local knowledge is the name of the game. Taken in by the association. Then have to be approved by the port and governor has to sign. Have to sign a bond. Put up bond for state. A legal document with state. Showing certificate for physical fitness and license. Goes through insurance company. Have to take physical every year. Tested for dope.

24:15

When taken in person sponsoring cannot be master. Master or mentor is appointed and is boss for a year. After one year of apprenticeship you become pilot. Most apprentices go to maritime academy. Have had

two apprentices. Have to bail apprentice out of trouble. Three committee men. Presiding officer, second in command and boatkeeper. Boatkeeper takes care of physical assets.

29:45

Steam ships have agents. Person responsible for ship gives agent what he needs. Agent knows particulars of ship. Pilot has to get some notice to get labor. Was 39th pilot. There are roughly 200 pilots right now. Channel has widened. Was on committee to widen the channel. Texas Chicken. Channel was 400 ft wide, ships were 600-700ft ships. 67 ft -80 ft wide. Now, 1300 ft ships, 140 ft wide. Channel was shallow. Deep draft was 36 ft. now 45 ft depth. Texas chicken safe way to meet. Meet head on. Cannot compress water. When meeting ship head on half a mile move 1-2 degrees. Each on their own side but looks horrible. Have fun with that. As a deckhand, there was no radio. Signals were given with whistle. If the other ship gives four whistles he has a problem. Learnt whistle signals as a deckhand. Deckhand was sent up to answer whistles. Pilots sometimes give hand signals. No use of flags. Communication before radio worked pretty well. In Houston with grain elevators whistles sounds would echo. Some pilots gave hand signals.

42:25

When ship comes in he gives notice that it will be there in 2-days to one week. If there is a change, agent will be notified. Now 3 days notice to be given to coast guard. Passenger lists, cargo lists etc. Pilots don't get notice till a week before ship arrives. May be four or five pilots on the boat at times. Dispatch in order of work. If it gets foggy, anchor in channel. If outbound, there is traffic you anchor, start ringing bell and blowing whistle to signal fog. Certain pilots wouldn't meet in fog, don't trust them. Can't see ship in dense fog but can see lights as they pass by. Texas chicken in fog, good radar. Never taken deep loaded ship. Wouldn't board a loaded ship against loaded ship in fog. All depends on who the person is and if he can be trusted. A pilot, Nixon loved to run the fog. Did it well. It was a game with him. Some people good at job but not at par.

53:00

Meeting two small ships, have to give way a little. Polish ship radar was very poor. Had a magnetic compass was all he had. Have to figure the error. Magnetic compass in fog is terrible. Pilots relationship with ship captains are good. Maybe some disagreements about how the job is done. Try to please the captain. If they know you are reliable they leave you alone. Never had an accident. Had a couple of brushes. Had an apprentice in his second year, handled ship by himself. Small mistake, rubbed against a ship, cut a gash in the cargo ship all the way across. Like being on a freeway and having a fender bender. Had one bad accident. Pilot and some crew members died. Red bluff across from Bayport. Norwegian ship run into Chinese ship and caught fire. One of tanks was punctured and lost a lot of cargo. Chinese ship burned for 3-4 days. Anchored outside the channel and channel was closed for few days. Tug was stationed with ship.

1:01:00

Tugs to help you on dock. If ship is very big 2-3 tugs to help you dock. Tugs are pretty strong with 5000 horsepower. Might rub a dock or lose an engine. Tugs can help stop or just let the ship drift if in the channel if engine is lost and no control on ship. Tugs help in turning as well. Report to captain about ship when boarding. Radars don't carry cargo, we don't make money with them, we don't need them. Now, must have 2 radars. Good navigation lights on channel. Night runs are not bad. Good range.
(demonstrates)

1:05:50

Boarding a ship. Two tires, two big fenders and a boarding platform. The tires will touch on both sides without hurting the ladder and you got to board. Going alongside for boarding is no problem. Take radio for navigation. Before radio carried a mouth whistle. Now marine radio. Battery operated. Has two channels. Now radios have many channels and marine operator. No talking on phone for navigation. Dispatcher is on 24 hrs a day.

1:10:00

Horse and buggy days, now electronic age. Not so much guesswork. Better communication. Before radios, you would see a ship coming and wonder who that is. Mason Wiggins, pilot, lost his life. Had heart attack and fell off and died. Westparker on an inbound ship, had heart attack and died. The Master has responsibility on ship. Discuss particulars of ship with Captain. (Shows radio used) Channel 13 was navigation channel. Channels like 77 was pilot office. Talk about navigation or just chat for a few minutes.

1:16:00

Socialize with other pilots. Close knit group of people. Retirements, Christmas parties try to meet then. Don't know many of the younger pilots. Paul Brown was first colored man. Commissioner did not want a colored man. Now Hensley, another black man as Pilot. Hiring women pilots was harder. During tenure worked with two women. There are meetings to air out likes and dislikes. All eat well on pilot boats. Grocery bills are pretty high. But since hours are long and tough, nobody complains about food.

1:22:00

Deckhands can get experience working alongside pilots. Had hired two deckhands during tenure. Both presiding officers now. Start small and then increase tonnage on license. Local knowledge is important for pilot. Have to have experience on a channel. Need enough trips to make pilot license. Need to know all equipment. Have to draw channel down to scale. But have no ship handling experience. Use a mate and navigated out in the ocean but did not steer in the channel. Stand watch and notice everything. Earlier apprenticeship was one year, then became 2 year, now it is 3 year. Tug people have better sense than ship people. Tug people have little more experience and knowledge for Houston ship channel. Ship people are steering with help of mate. Quartermaster is usually one who steers. People come from all over to work. People like Captain Tom Lightsey stationed in Mississippi would come to Houston on a regular basis and then decided to move here.